Live Fire Training

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The Army today faces the task of maintaining tough, realistic multi-echelon training within an austere budget. With fewer opportunities to conduct live fire training, a smart commander must make the most of those he does have. Live fires may well be the best way to train as many soldiers as possible, at every level, in such a short amount of time.

A well-executed live fire exercise also inspires confidence in the soldiers—confidence in their weapons, their peers, their leaders, and their unit. Young privates see all of the platoon's firepower brought to bear. They see their team leaders leading by example and the squad leader controlling his squad amid the noise and smoke. They see squad leaders becoming mentors and their new platoon leader undergoing his acid test in front of them and their company commander.

Live fire training in peacetime thoroughly exercises the planning process at every echelon, and the entire chain of command must be involved:

The commander has overall responsibility for the success of the live fire mission. His creativity and attention to detail make it all work; his lack of these traits can turn it into another "canned" exercise that wastes the soldiers' time and leaves them with nothing but shell casings in the weeds and a ringing in their ears.

Depending on the scope and intent of the mission, the executive officer can be responsible for numerous tasks—pushing ammunition forward during the consolidation phase and evacuating "wounded" soldiers, serving as the pickup zone (PZ) control officer or the safety officer with the mortars, or coordinating logistics (with the supply sergeant), on both ends of the actual exercise.

The first sergeant, as the senior enlisted trainer in the unit, is responsible for training the common task and individual soldier skills needed to execute the mission. During planning, he helps the commander by approving the drills selected by the platoon sergeants and squad leaders to support the company's mission essential tasks. He supervises leaders at all levels, critiques squad operations orders, monitors ammunition distribution, observes rehearsals, and reinforces such common skills as camouflage, individual movement techniques, and maintenance.

During the execution of the live fire, it is up to the commander to decide where the first sergeant can be most effectively employed. He may be with the support-by-fire element, serving as an experienced observer on the ground to confirm the lifting and shifting of direct fires ahead of the assault element. In a large company live fire, he may be with the supporting attack; at the casualty collection point or the enemy prisoner of war point during consolidation and reorganization; or he may stay at the landing zone to coordinate the arrival of extraction or medical evacuation aircraft.

The supply sergeant can work with the XO for the delivery and distribution of all classes of supply. If the live fire is the culmination of a field problem or deployment, he can work out of the field trains to transport ammunition forward as part of the logistical package. If the operation takes place from garrison, he is responsible for any needed transportation, all classes of supply consumed during the operation; and, during consolidation and reorganization, he can supervise the loading and unloading of a supply helicopter bringing supplies in for follow-on operations.

The fire support officer or members of his team must be present for any operations involving mortars or artillery. Even during squad live fires on small ranges without the capacity to incorporate anything larger than 7.62mm ammunition, a forward observer should be somewhere near the action, either calling for fire or critiquing the squad leader's calls.

In a larger scenario, planning gets more complex. The FSO and the company commander must also identify overhead firing restrictions for 60mm mortars, determine how hasty a "hasty lay" can be when the mortars go into action, coordinate with the dedicated firing battery, find aerial routes in and out, and coordinate all the fire planning that goes into setting up the range.

The fire support team's training begins as soon as the initial planning session with range control ends. Among other things, they laser designate targets, walk the ground with the commander to determine phase lines, help define time of movement instead of time of flight, calculate danger-close lines, and find minimum safe distances (MSDs).

The key to successful tactical operations is a good rehearsal. For air assaults, leaders should try to get the aircraft for at least an hour before PZ time to let the troops reacquaint themselves with loading, manifesting, seating arrangements, and seatbelts. (Nothing can throw a schedule off faster than excited troops trying to figure out how to put on their safety belts.) If four-point shoulder harnesses are required, rehearsals are imper-

ative for reducing time on the ground.

At night, the safety-belt shuffle is even more difficult and time-consuming. Crew chiefs have to climb over and around rucksacks, mortar rounds, equipment, and soldiers to check the security of the load. Aircraft loading rehearsals must therefore be conducted with all gear, and it should be made clear at the air mission conference that crew chiefs will participate in ground rehearsals.

Other things to think about for an air assault are bump and load plans, cross-leveling weapons on aircraft, flight times, which side of the LZ may be hot (so that automatic weapons can be put on that side), and downed aircraft procedures. Most units have well-established air mission checklists to cover these points and others as well.

The coordination of artillery, U.S. Air Force aircraft, and attack helicopters with inbound assault aircraft is a complex planning drill that involves all unit commanders. Pulling off a successful H-hour requires detailed planning, wargaming, and rehearsing. The live H-hour, which requires numerous assets, is best left for company-level live fires, but there is no reason the commander cannot plan and execute a dry H-hour. For a platoon mission, the company FSO can act as the battalion FSO, or even the air mission commander; he will gain valuable experience for his next job, whether it is as fire direction officer of a firing battery or as the battalion FSO, where he will be responsible for such assets as close air support and attack helicopters.

Range control is a training aid that allows commanders to tailor training areas and resources to training events to improve combat readiness. Commanders should make sure they get a written scenario (if required) on time and that they are kept informed of any changes. They need a lot of lead time to work out their own details, such as safety fans, areas that may need to be cleared of duds, and coordinating shutdowns of adjacent ranges.

A good technique is for the commander to invite the range control safety officer to the range with all key players to walk the ground so he will know what is needed. The platoon leader must make sure what he wants to do before taking the safety officer out on the ground; azimuths need to be on hand, and a global positioning system (GPS) for recording exact safety fan grids is helpful. The FSO should be there to talk about MSDs and sequencing of fires. When a logical scenario is presented and everyone agrees on azimuths, MSDs, axes of attack, limits of advance, types of ordnance, and all the other details, range control personnel will do whatever they can to help.

For squad live fires, it is not necessary to incorporate more than organic small arms into the training. With the platoon's M60 machineguns set up on a flank and the mortars firing from a nearby observation post (OP), the commander will have all the realism he needs; whether the fire is impacting on his range or not, the gunners can still receive calls for fire and fire into their own impact area. The secret is for the commander to be creative with his assets but not to attempt more than he can handle. If he coordinates more than is necessary, he may end up with a set-piece exercise in which the troops are just going through the motions.

For platoon live fires, more weapon systems can be brought to bear, and the leader can be more creative with the use of terrain and the way it supports the execution. The scenario must not be driven by the terrain. On most reservations, a platoon is about the most that can shoot and still retain some freedom of maneuver and flexibility in execution.

For company live fires, planning should begin at least four months ahead to coordinate all the assets needed. If the commander wants to execute a company live fire successfully, he should not let it turn into an excuse for all the combined arms people to tag along—for example, he may not really need Vulcans firing as part of his scenario and should not have them unless it makes sense tactically.

On the other hand, writing his scenario as part of a battalion mission can pay dividends because it gets the battalion staff involved. Assets normally out of reach to a company commander become available, such as attack helicopters and close air support. Again, however, it must make sense to include them. Too many players can turn the live fire into a ponderous, canned exercise. The commander should keep in mind throughout planning what he wants the end state to be and what he wants to achieve with his company, and then plan the exercise to meet these goals.

During rehearsals on the dry fire lane, with opposing force (OPFOR) troops on the objective, MILES (multiple integrated laser engagement system) is the best thing available for teaching soldiers to take well-aimed shots from cover during an assault. MILES can be used to train the fundamentals of continuous forward movement and continuous suppressive fire during the assault. In addition, it trains the leaders to be aware of and responsible for killing everything in their sectors of fire. Before moving the squads onto the live fire lane, they should be put through the lane until they are thoroughly comfortable with the units on their left and right, and until they can maintain continuous fire and movement and kill all targets. MILES training should also be conducted before night live fires; it gets soldiers used to firing downrange with their buddies moving close alongside and builds confidence.

Night firing is a culminating event for a rifle company. A commander should not conduct a night live fire assault until he is comfortable with his soldiers' performance during daytime live fires. The squad leaders should wear AN/PVS-7 night vision goggles around their necks, taking periodic checks; the platoon leaders wearing them in the head harness; and the team leaders leading by example and keeping their teams under control. No artificial illumination is needed either—such as chemlights on the silhouettes, as some units have been known to do.

Non-illuminated night attacks are not any harder to execute, but they do require more thorough rehearsals. Every soldier needs to know not only who is on his left and right but about how far he is going to bound, whether he rolls left or right or has a habit of drifting left or right during individual movement techniques. This may sound like overplanning the assault phase, but it just allows the squad members to know each other's habits under stress.

With all the planning, terrain walking, and briefings in preparation for the live fire, there is a danger of its becoming routine. There are several techniques to keep this from happening.

The first is to conduct all blank and MILES training on similar terrain instead of on the actual lane to be used. While it may be feasible to walk all leaders through the actual lane to talk about MSDs and safety considerations, there is no need to let the troops see the ground they're going to fight for until it is time. If money is tight, just doing a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) is good.

Another way to maintain realism and the free flow of the event is to provide more than one way to do it. That is, let the squad or platoon leader decide which flank is best for setting up the support position and let him figure out where the limit of advance is. This requires detailed planning and thorough reconnaissance, but it can be done.

No artificial range-limiting stakes or phase-line markers should be allowed. If properly planned and surveyed, this approach adds a great deal of realism. Trails, streams, and unique terrain provide all the indicators needed to keep the bullets going in the right direction and the lead fire team just outside MSD.

Finally, an execution or brevity checklist for the leaders and safety personnel should be mandatory. A list of key events given an alpha-numeric code keeps everyone on track. This, added into the H-hour, keeps everyone informed. This improves flexibility; for example, if the assault is over early, the extraction aircraft can come in on call instead of waiting for a specific time. It trains radiotelephone operators and leaders to be concise and flexible and doesn't tie up time on the radio when everyone is ready to move out.

Planning for a company live fire should begin at least four months ahead. Platoons need about half that long. Squad lanes can be put together rather easily, but in keeping with the intent of Field Manual 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, five weeks out is not too early. Early in the planning cycle, the commander should circle the tasks in the MTP that he wants his company trained on and offer it to the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants for their input during his training meeting. Once he has his list of tasks, the commander should not add any more unless it makes sense tactically.

During the train-up, he should make sure the junior leaders stress the fundamentals and conduct plenty of rehearsals. These include common skills often overlooked such as reducing a stoppage, magazine and barrel quick-change, misfire procedures, and collective skills, such as breaching a wire obstacle, maintaining continuous suppressive fire, continuous movement, and consolidation and reorganization. Once on the range, he should let no element go downrange until he is convinced that it is properly trained.

After-action reviews, as the combat training centers have discovered, are significantly improved by video. Video shows in real time the sequencing of events and what really happened. Troops and leaders get caught up in the action and sometimes remember very little after it's over. One or two well-placed, inconspicuous video recorders can make all the difference. Also, every soldier who pulled a trigger should submit a written critique with suggestions. It is interesting to see the comments, and good ideas from them will improve future training.

A properly executed live fire is the best training for building teamwork, cohesion, and confidence. Tough and realistic training are the watchwords of today's smaller Army. In preparation for combat, nothing beats the multi-echelon training gained from the conception, planning, coordination, rehearsal, and execution of a safe, well organized small-unit live fire.

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The Platoon Raid
Leader's Reconnaissance and Fire Control

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The raid is probably the most difficult and challenging of all the tasks on an infantry platoon mission essential task list (METL), but it can also be the most rewarding for its leaders. The raid requires extensive planning and a large measure of autonomy in execution. Frequently, in a raid, there are no adjacent units—left, right, or front—to depend on in the event